

# Late-Deafened Individuals: Implications for Postsecondary Outcomes

**RS**  
Research  
Summarized

## What does it mean to be late-deafened?

“Late-deafened” has a variety of meanings but typically refers to hearing loss that occurs after childhood.\* Individuals who are late-deafened have generally obtained oral communication skills prior to their hearing loss.<sup>1</sup> Factors that can cause late-onset hearing loss include impacted earwax, prolonged exposure to loud noise, head trauma, or complications from viruses such as rubella and scarlet fever.<sup>2</sup>

## How does being late-deafened affect psychological well-being?

Being late-deafened is considered *adventitious*, meaning that it is generally unexpected.<sup>3</sup> Compared with individuals who are born deaf, individuals who are late-deafened tend to report the following:

- Lower levels of psychological adjustment<sup>5</sup>
- Decreased levels of happiness that do not ameliorate over time<sup>6</sup>
- Greater belief that they have a disability<sup>7</sup>

Some individuals who are late-deafened report more symptoms of the following:

- Loss or social isolation<sup>8</sup>
- Depression
- Helplessness or guilt

Protective factors for psychological well-being include the following:

- Positive relationships with both deaf and hearing peers<sup>9</sup>
- Concrete goals for coping with an adventitious disability<sup>10</sup>
- Higher socioeconomic status<sup>4</sup>

“Individuals who are late-deafened share the cultural experience of having been raised in the hearing community and having ‘become’ deaf rather than having been born deaf.”<sup>11</sup>

## What are employment implications for late-deafened individuals?

Potential workplace access issues include needing to do the following:<sup>12</sup>

- Shifting from telephone use to other means of communication
- Educating colleagues and supervisors on effective communication strategies
- Maintaining incidental professional learning experiences

\*Though it is generally accepted that individuals who are late-deafened become deaf after acquisition of speech and language, there is no consensus on what age puts an individual into that category. Impact of onset is developmentally sensitive—a change in hearing ability at age 5 would have significantly different impact on identity, communication, and other skill development than a change at age 18.



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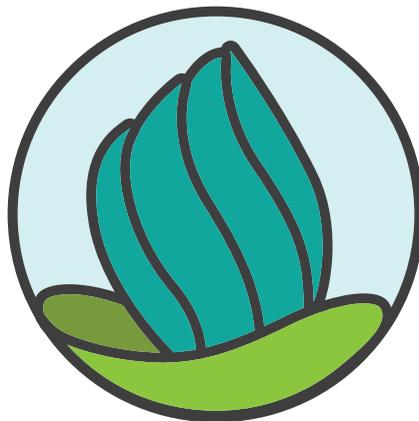
Potential challenges in gaining employment-related services include the following:

- Assumptions that late-deafened consumers are less likely to benefit from services than consumers who were born deaf<sup>13</sup>
- Fewer services associated with competitive jobs provided to consumers who are late-deafened<sup>13</sup>
- A focus on the person's hearing loss rather than employable skills<sup>14</sup>

## References

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